

APPENDIX.

REPORT

OF THE

ENGINEER

OF THE

SECOND DISTRICT SWAMP LANDS,

STATE OF LOUISIANA.

NEW ORLEANS :

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REPORT OF THE ENGINEER OF THE 2D DISTRICT SWAMP LANDS.

*Office of Engineer 2d District Swamp
Lands.*

WEST BATON ROUGE, LA., }
December 20, 1853. }

In conformity with the rules laid down by your honorable Board in the by-laws by which I am governed, I herewith submit you a brief report of my operations during the short time in which I have had the honor to serve upon the Engineer Department of this District.

On the 1st of August, 1853, I was appointed by Mr. Kirkland, Assistant Engineer for the 2d Swamp Land District, and immediately entered upon the duties of my office, and performed the labor required thereby, until the death of Mr. Kirkland, who fell a victim to the yellow fever, from exposure whilst in the active discharge of his official duties, September 29th, 1853.

This unexpected accident deprived the department of the Engineer just at a moment when his services were most needed, and my illness from a severe attack of the same fever, together with your feeble health at the same time, left us almost entirely helpless for awhile; but the prevalence of the epidemic, which scourged our land at a season when our active exertions could be most advantageously employed, effected every department alike, and the work laid out for an early commencement, was thus unavoidably delayed until the advance of the season passed upon us.

In this condition we were placed, when my selection to fill the vacancy occasioned by the death of Mr. Kirkland, was made by you, November 8th, when I took charge of the official papers left by him; and have since endeavored to perform the duties of the office to the best of my ability.

Under your instructions to me, dated November the 8th, I proceeded to the Grand Levee in the Parish of Pointe Coupée, to finish the engineering left incomplete there, and to supervise the construction of the levee.

On November 24th, I repaired to the Atchafalaya River, where I surveyed the localities and leveled the sites for dikes, or

levees to be placed across Lake, Middle, Picketts and West Bayous, near their junction with the east side of the Atchafalaya River, and returning there upon the 10th of December. I let out the same work on the 10th and 12th to the lowest bidder, in accordance with advertisement made by you concerning the same.

On the 19th of December, I made a partial survey of Point Manoir, in the Parish of West Baton Rouge, in company with yourself, and since that time, when not engaged in the superintendence of the construction of the Grand Levee, I have been constantly employed in office duties.

I have already formed and divided the District over which my office extends, into Levee Wards and Draining Districts, in conformity with the requirements of the 11th section of the Act, and submit the same for your concurrence, as follows:

District No. 2 of the Swamp Lands is subdivided as follows:

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

1—Bounded on the North by the 31st degree of latitude; South by the Bayou Plaquemines and Grand River; East by the Mississippi River, and West by the Atchafalaya River.

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

2—Bounded on the North by Bayou Plaquemines, Grand River, and the Mississippi River; South by the southern boundaries of the Parishes of Assumption, St. Mary and St. Charles; East by the Mississippi River, and the eastern boundary of the Parish of St. Charles; West by Grand River and Lake Paloude.

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

3—To be composed of the Parishes of Jefferson and Plaquemines, West of the Mississippi River, with their boundaries.

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

4—To be composed of the Parishes of Lafourche Interior and Terrebonne, with their boundaries.

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

5—To be composed of the Parishes of St. Mary, St. Martin and Lafayette, and bounded with their lines.

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

6—To be composed of the Parishes of Vermillion and St. Landry, with their boundaries.

Levee Ward and Drainage District No.

7—To be formed by the Parish of Calcasieu.

The construction of the Grand Levee has engrossed much of my time, and I have co-operated with you as far as possible in removing the many obstacles and vexatious causes which have been thrown in our way to prevent the completion of this great bulwark of defence against the waters of the Mississippi River.

These obstacles, though at one time most formidable, have been entirely surmounted, and we can now congratulate ourselves upon an assurance of the completion of the Grand Levee before the rise of the river shall render the country in danger of an overflow.

My predecessor having surveyed and located the Grand Levee, estimated the work as containing 161,412.30 cubic yards, independent of the centre ditch required beneath the levee, and also the road and its ditches, to draw off transportation of water. For these, however, I have subsequently estimated the centre ditch of five feet width on the top, eighteen inches in the bottom, and four feet deep, measure 3,503.13 cubic yards.

The road, to be ditched and graded heavily, is to be contracted for by linear measure; but its contents are estimated at 7,166.39 cubic yards. This should be constructed as early as the work upon the levee will allow.

The first sale of this levee, in accordance with the provision of the Act, was made August 5th, 1853, at the Grand Levee, and the various sections therein were bid off separately and adjudicated to the lowest bidder, Mr. John Toy, at an average price of 19 3/4 cts. per cubic yard, which brought the cost of the levee proper to \$31,217 13, not including the centre ditch and road, the estimate for which as extra work amounts to \$2,866 55: 20 cents per cubic yard, bringing the whole cost of the Grand Levee to \$34,083 68.

The contractor proceeded at once to arrange matters for an immediate commencement of the work, but the yellow fever made its appearance along the river coast, and sweeping over the Parish of Pointe Coupée with desolating fury, it hovered for weeks in the very vicinity of the Grand Levee, so that it was impossible for any body of men to be brought in the neighborhood of the work. Thus operations thereon were de-

layed until late in the season, when the scarcity of men, the extraordinary rise in the price of provisions, and materials for labor, rendered it almost impossible for the contractor to comply with his contract; but in the face of such difficulties, he prosecuted the work with what force he could with great exertions collect together, until the expiration of the limited time allowed him to complete this contract on the 1st of December, 1853.

At this time the work not being completed, the contract was declared forfeited and reverted back to this department; and I made an estimate and measurement of the work as already done, so that it might be again sold and prosecuted under your own immediate management. The measurement of this work amounted to 18,043 cubic yards, which at the average cost per cubic yard, amounted to \$3,486 25, leaving an amount of 154,118.88 cubic yards to complete the levee, including the extra work of the ditches and road. An immediate arrangement was entered into with several parties, by which the work could be pushed forward most rapidly, but at an advanced rate, for it could not be sold for less than an average of 25 cents per cubic yard, which will increase the cost of constructing the Grand Levee over the first estimate of \$34,083 68 to \$7,932 29; so that it will require \$42,015 97 to construct the work.

The appropriation of \$30,000 towards this work, made during the last Legislature, then falls short \$12,015 97, and I would most earnestly recommend that this amount be obtained if possible to secure the labor already expended upon this important work, an appropriation which may save millions of dollars to the State.

A careful survey of the confluence of the four bayous mentioned above, with the Atchafalaya River, convinced me of the great benefits to be derived from closing them, an act by which the State would reclaim a large body of land overflowed by the waters of that river, which could be confined to its channel without injury; and in compliance with your instructions, I located and laid off the ground for levees across the mouth of these bayous, and subsequently after the delay of the usual advertisements, I sold the construction of the levees to the lowest bidder, adjudicating them as follows:

Middle Bayou was sold to Mr. J. A. Miller, Parish of Pointe Coupée, at nineteen and three-fourths cents per cubic yard.

Lake Bayou was sold to Mr. E. S. Gordon, Parish of St. Landry, at twenty cents per cubic yard.

Picketts Bayou was sold to Mr. E. S. Gordon, Parish St. Landry, at twenty cents per cubic yard.

West Bayou was sold to G. B. Miller as agent for others, at nineteen and one-half cents per cubic yard.

The two first to be completed before the first day of March, 1854, and the two latter next summer, and herewith I enclose you these contracts as signed and delivered in form.

The full employment of my time upon more pressing business of this department, did not allow me to make a complete survey of the Bayou Laténache at its junction with the Atchafalaya River, but from what I have seen, and the best information gleaned from unbiased sources, I am convinced that a large body of swamp and overflowed land may be reclaimed and fully drained, by closing this bayou, as well as others in that vicinity, if a proper drainage of rain water can be had either naturally or artificially. I would therefore suggest that a careful instrumental examination be made of the swamp land lying below the Bayou Laténache, as early as the season will allow.

There are other points requiring urgent attention, by their means of remunerating any outlays that we may place upon them, and to throw into our treasury rich returns; but I would respectfully call your attention in particular to the Bayou Choctaw, emptying into Plaquemine Bay, in the Parish of Iberville, which bayou by being properly cleared out for a few miles, would reclaim to us and bring into market at once a large body of land now nearly worthless, and would materially benefit one of the most important portions of this State. A survey and estimate thereon could be made at any time, and the result I am certain would justify an expenditure for such an improvement. In making surveys for improvements by which the State reclaims large and fertile portions of her overflowed lands, I am the more fully convinced day by day of the great importance of a temporary reservation from market of such lands as are about being improved, and until such improvements are made, so as to render such lands of great value, when they can be thrown into market and sold by auction to the highest bidder.

Thus the actual settler and cultivator is put upon a footing with the speculator, and the State is more properly remunerated for her expenditures in the reclamation and improvement of waste and overflowed lands, whilst the increased revenue accruing from such a step would enable her to prosecute

the most enterprising measures for reclaiming to herself a rich domain.

Since my appointment to this office I have received several communications from owners of private lands, requesting me, as Engineer of this District, to survey, lay out, and build for them new levees, where the old levees require removal, upon the banks of the Mississippi River; but as my time has been entirely occupied upon more important duties connected with this office, I have not been able to attend to them, and even had I possessed time to do so, the uncertain and vague interpretation of the language of the Act, would naturally prevent my action in the premises without great assurance. The language of the Act does not in my opinion clearly define my position and duties, except when called to act in cases of emergency; and rather than commit an act not clearly approved by the letter and spirit of the law, I deem it most prudent and advisable to refer the matter to the consideration of your honorable Board of Commissioners, and await your instructions for future directions. I herewith transmit a copy of a letter addressed to me by J. L. Lobdell, Esq., of the Parish of West Baton Rouge, whose legal attainments render his opinion of great weight.

I would suggest and recommend that the 15th section of the Act be so amended as to leave the time for the completion of contracts under the requirements of said Act, to the discretion of the Board of Commissioners and the Engineers of the several Districts, as the fixed time at present specified therein, often renders the making of contracts impossible.

I would also call your attention to that part of section 16 relative to our authority to call out aid from persons living within seven miles of a threatened crevasse, and which authority may often be rendered of little service in sparsely settled districts where such assistance is most likely to be urgently needed.

The prosecution of the various duties incumbent upon this office have been greatly embarrassed by the refusal of the Auditor of the State to advance the funds required, therefore his eccentric opinion leading him to believe that there had been no specific appropriation made by the Legislature to carry out the provisions of the Act to reclaim and drain the swamp and overflowed lands; but neither my predecessor or myself have allowed this action upon the part of the Auditor to retard the work of our office when we could prevent it, and though deprived of our salaries, we have cheerfully advanced the means from our own

fund, and upon our responsibility, whenever called upon, to forward the pressing and important duties which have frequently devolved upon us.

The greatest economy has been practised, and though greatly in need of the services of an assistant, I have endeavored as far as possible to perform the duties of both offices myself, and have been obliged to furnish the same with the constant use of my own instruments.

This office being destitute of instruments required for the proper surveys and examinations to be frequently made hereafter, I request permission to purchase such instru-

ments and drawing materials as are actually needed by the Engineers.

Before closing this report I would ask your kind indulgence in excusing its length and any omissions that I may have made in thus throwing together for your supervision, such remarks as the hurried moments allowed me to perform this duty would permit.

Respectfully submitted,

(Signed) LAFAYETTE CALDWELL,
Engineer 2d Swamp Land District,
State of Louisiana.

STEPHEN VAN WICKLE, Esq.,
Com. 2d Swamp Land District.

JOHN S. LOBDELL, ESQ., TO L. CALDWELL,

CONCERNING THE BUILDING OF HIS LEVEE BY THE STATE.

BAYOUS, Parish West Baton Rouge, }
Friday, 11th Nov., 1853. }

Mr. LAFAYETTE CALDWELL—*Dear Sir*: I have just been informed that you have received the appointment of Engineer of Levees in this District, in the place of V. Kirkland, lately deceased, and having endeavored heretofore to get the proper State and parish officers to determine the locality, extent and dimensions of the new levee, to be made on the upper part of my plantation, back of and behind that part of the front where the crevasse occurred in May last, by the caving of the bank and levee, which had been delayed in consequence of the death of Mr. Kirkland, and until another Engineer should be appointed in his place. I will now again renew my request that my new levee be located, its extent and dimensions fixed, and all other proceedings be had required by the laws, and here give you a copy of my note to the Inspector of my District:

"To Mr. JAMES DEVAL, Inspector—28th September, 1853—*My Dear Sir*: I wish to bring to your notice the necessity of preparing to make the new levee on the upper part of my plantation, back of and behind that part of the front where the crevasse occurred in May last, by the caving in of the bank and levee. Knowing that it is contemplated that all new levees and repairs of old

levees are in future to be paid out of the proceeds of the swamp lands donated to the State for that and other purposes, and believing that the Act of our last Legislature intended and did direct the manner in which those new levees and repairs of old levees should be made, I now request, in conformity with the provisions of that Act, that you notify Mr. V. Kirkland, the Engineer of this District, to determine the locality, extent and dimensions of said new levee, and let out the making of said levee in conformity with law. You will readily perceive the importance of acting in this matter without delay, in order that the levee may be made and secured in time to protect not only the swamp lands in the rear, but also the plantations of the neighboring planters, as well as my own plantation. Your early attention to this will oblige yours."

Mr. Devall came up last week, and laid out the route of the new levee, but as you are the proper officer, under the law, to do this and other formalities, I would prefer your making the location, &c., without delay, as it is time to have the levee under way. It is probable I may bid off the making of it, and if so, will be willing to receive the warrant of the Commissioners on the Auditor, or any other reasonable arrangement.

I am very sincerely yours,
(Signed,) JOHN S. LOBDELL.